Inherited Movement, Traditions Redefined

A Senior Honors Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for graduation *with research distinction* in the undergraduate colleges of The Ohio State University

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The Ohio State University
June 2009

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ABSTRACT

Movement of the African Diaspora has a rich history that has yet to be studied and practiced as widely as other movement traditions today. The integration of movement of the African Diaspora into required curriculums across institutions of education is relatively small. Access to viewing this genre of movement also remains smaller than more prevalent forms of dance such as ballet and modern.

Through this research we intended to expand our knowledge and movement vocabulary in order to help perpetuate the rich traditions that lie within movement of the African Diaspora. We desired to continue to create opportunities for citizens to view, analyze, and appreciate this type of movement. We conducted research via various texts, online articles, interviews, and study of choreographic and performance processes that represented movement of the African Diaspora. We directed a concert that involved several dancers that were allowed to learn and experience dance of the African Diaspora that is not studied intensely or as a requirement in the department of dance at The Ohio State University. We continue to bring this genre of movement to a broader audience by doing lecture/demonstrations at schools within the community, classes at The Ohio State University and various local venues. Our concert allowed our audience, fellow dancers and ourselves to indulge in and experience black dance in a concert setting.

We realized that not everyone understood the history and meanings behind movement of the African Diaspora. We broadened the audience of this movement and distributed the history of this tradition. Institutions should integrate these traditions into their curriculums because it is

important to provide students with knowledge of all forms of dance. We will further our studies of dance of the African Diaspora in order to offer people its history and traditional practices.

INTRODUCTION

During spring quarter of 2007, Erika Harris (a fellow dance major) and I reminisced about our dance backgrounds and how we missed the techniques that we used to practice. She spoke of Ailey classes with April Berry, while I recalled classes at Garth Fagan Dance School. As we conversed, we noticed similarities between our different trainings, but also noticed a slight disconnect between our traditions in dance and what we were learning in college. We noticed connections between the dancing we did in our youth and our heritage as African American women, but did not see that same connection to the dancing we experienced on the OSU campus. This was troubling. As a dancer, I view dance as a mode of communication as well as a viable form of preservation, used for sharing and preserving one's heritage with the current generation as well as generations to come. In light of this, Erika Harris and I felt a strong desire to develop our conversation further and bring our very unique but connected backgrounds to the OSU campus and greater Columbus area.

My study of dance began quite slowly. Although I was interested in dance from the age of six, I did not begin pursuing it until the age of 11, when I joined my church's budding liturgical dance group. At the age of 13, I began taking ballet, followed by modern and jazz, at Hochstein School of Music and Dance in Rochester, NY. I was accepted into the school's dance ensemble and after performing with the group for several months, it was clear to me that I was no longer satisfied with my experiences there. The school focused on ballet, and I soon realized that my body type did not make me an ideal candidate for a professional career in ballet. Disheartened by my experiences, I discontinued my dance education at the school. A friend of mine suggested that I take lessons at another school, called Garth Fagan Dance School. I did not

know much about the school, but my friend assured me that I would love it, and I knew I had to experience it for myself. This was a turning point in my dance career, because at age 16, I was in the process of deciding what I wanted to do with my life after high school.

When I arrived at Garth Fagan Dance School, I was simply blown away. I had never experienced such grace, agility and beauty in my life! And when I saw that the Garth Fagan Dancers came in all shapes, sizes and colors, I knew I had to stay. This was a new kind of dancing, and a new kind of dance school. Teachers were mentors. Fellow students were friends. Everyone helped each other become a better dancer, and everyone was serious about their work. I immediately noticed that Fagan technique was unlike any other that I had experienced in the sense that it was an expertly blended mix of ballet, modern, and Afro-Caribbean movement. Although I had never done movement from the Caribbean islands and had little experience in modern dance, the movement felt like home to me. For the first time in a long time, dancing felt good. I fit right into the technique because as a dancer, I maintain my connection to the ground, move with agility, and possess the "aesthetic of the cool", which is a kind of care-free or relaxed attitude. Even after leaving Garth Fagan Dance School and arriving at The Ohio State University, I never forgot the internal sensations and dialogue that always occurred when I performed Fagan technique. This was a topic of great discussion between Erika Harris and me, and we sought to investigate the matter together.

We started by discussing the similarities between the forms of dance that we were most accustomed. We discussed similarities on the physical, kinesthetic and aesthetic level first. Then we conversed about the common background of the dance forms, and how they were used by people of African descent to express themselves during every phase of their journeys. From

Africa to the Americas, they used dance to lament or rejoice, retaliate or share, and this is what interested us most, the common thread amongst all the dance forms of the African Diaspora.

We became very interested in investigating the movement characteristics and continuities further, and we both expressed an interest in experiencing it physically and sharing it with the Columbus community. We felt that a subject of this magnitude needed to be shared with the general public, so that everyone could be more knowledgeable on the subject and be able to appreciate our heritage. It had to be larger than the usual senior dance project, which usually consists of a dance work or two. The research had to be able to showcase various dance forms of the African Diaspora all at once, so that an audience could clearly see the common threads and progressions of the dance forms. This is how our evening-length performance was born. We decided that this project had to be an entire evening-length performance, in order to do the research justice. This way, our audiences would receive a more complete view of the progressions, and not just a snapshot, which is what a typical senior project would have afforded us.

My partner and I instantly began to brainstorm about the choreographers who would understand our vision and the dancers who would do the work justice. In thinking about choreographers, we realized that we would need quite a bit of funding. So, with the help of our advisor, Dr. Melanye White Dixon, we began mapping out the specifics of our research as well as how much it would cost to put on a show of this magnitude and how we would acquire the funds. In the spring of 2008, we were fortunate enough to secure funds from the Undergraduate Research Scholarship, and with ample funding available to us, we set out to create our visual and kinesthetic research: our dance concert.

We secured choreographers who would each create one work for the show in the following dance forms: West African, Afro-Caribbean, spiritual/gospel dance, modern, post-modern and hip hop. Although the list of dance forms omits several very important ones (i.e., tap, jazz, various American social dances) we felt that the forms we chose were most important to our particular heritages and backgrounds in dance. And so in this way, the concert was not about dance forms of the African Diaspora in general, but about our specific traditions in Africanist dance and the forms of dance that most influence who we are as dancers today. For choreography, we chose the following local and national artists: Suzan Bradford-Kounta (local artist), Roslyn Dove (local artist), Carmen Alston (local artist), Guy Thorne, Nicole Stanton and Manwe Sauls-Addison. We asked fellow OSU dance majors as well as a number of dancers from the Columbus community to dance in several of the works with us. Once the dancers and choreographers were secured, we went to work during the summer of 2008, working tirelessly almost every day, from the end of June until the beginning of September.

WEST AFRICAN AND AFRO-CARIBBEAN

For the African piece, we asked Suzan Bradford-Kounta, a local choreographer and director of Thiossane Institute, to choreograph for us. She taught us various steps from the dances Econ-con and Lingen, which are dances that originated in Senegal. Bradford-Kounta made a point to teach us the history of the dances as well as their meaning. In her interview, she states that Econ-con is a dance that depicts a typical planting and harvest season. In the dance, we plant and cover the seeds, pray to the gods for rain, and then celebrate the harvest. In the second half of Bradford-Kounta's piece, we perform the Lingen. This dance is typically done by women only and is a dance to bless a pregnant woman. The blessing is for good health, good wealth, and a long life. Bradford-Kounta spoke of the peoples who created the dances and provided us with authentic garb to wear for the concert. As we studied with her, I instantly began to notice elements of the dances that I use in many other dance forms. Dropping the center of weight, resiliency, and a marriage to the music were some of the most evident common elements. I found that although the steps were foreign to me, these elements felt like home. Learning the intricate details of the dances was a challenging feat, but there was always something familiar about the movement. What I found most challenging was achieving the trademark since of freedom of the movement while staying true to the specific shapes that the choreographer was asking for. It was difficult for me to maintain the specific body positions and still allow the movement to flow. This is important to West African dance: specificity and freedom, and it took great effort for me to even begin to achieve this. Often times, when one thinks of freedom of movement, one does not think of specific shapes, but of free flowing movement and fluid shapes. The West African dance provided an interesting learning experience in that it challenged my ideas of freedom of movement.

The Afro-Caribbean work was choreographed by another local artist, Roslyn Dove. In the documentary that is included in our show, Ms. Dove states that she was never formally trained in Afro-Caribbean or Dunham (a form of dance derived from Haitian dance) but her ancestors and relatives are from the Dominican Republic, and she learned the movement from them. The movement was her native dance form, even though she was born and raised in America. The dance that she created for us portrayed two new slaves who had been taken to the Caribbean islands and were trying to make sense of their new lives. In this dance, the torso finds smooth mobility as opposed to the sharp backward-and-forward movements employed in the West African piece. There are many undulations in the piece and smooth rolling in the shoulders and hips. Many movements were low to the ground and the movements seemed to roll off of the music, making the relationship between the two very obvious, as it was in the West African piece.

As I mentioned earlier, I trained extensively in Fagan technique, which draws on traditions in dance from the Caribbean islands, especially Jamaica. While some of the characteristics of the Afro-Caribbean dance were familiar to me, I still found the dance to be challenging. Not only did it require an extremely high level of stamina, it also required that I access the mobility of all my joints and bones at once. Whereas in Fagan technique, we often isolate body parts for undulation (i.e., the lumbar spine and thoracic spine), the work that I performed for our research required me to undulate the entire spine at once. During the first rehearsals with Dove, I often found myself discontinuing the undulation at the vertebral spine, when the choreographer was asking for involvement of the whole spinal column. I quickly discovered what my natural tendencies are and how, when I release them, my movement quality

becomes completely different. When I finally involved the vertebral spine in the undulation, my movement became more fluid. This simple change created a more authentic look on my body.

SPIRITUAL

The next work in the show was the spiritual or gospel work. This dance was choreographed by Carmen Alston, another local artist. The dance was not choreographed the way I expected it to be, and this leads me to the puzzling question that had not been answered before the choreographic process began. The question was, what is a spiritual dance, and how is it different from worship dance, praise dance, liturgical dance, and dancing in the Spirit? And how are they all alike? Had we all come to a conclusion as to what all these terms mean, perhaps the dance would have turned out the way I had expected. After completing the performance, it is my understanding that a spiritual dance (also called a Negro spiritual dance) is a dance along the same lines as Alvin Ailey's 'Revelations'. These are dances that portray what a typical church service in an African American church is like. They are narratives set to spiritual or gospel songs. That is what we called the dance form of the piece, and that is what our choreographer gave us!

In the beginning, we referred to it as many things: the gospel piece, the spiritual piece, and the liturgical or praise dance piece. I found that these terms are not all interchangeable, and I was fortunate enough to receive clarification on this matter at the 2009 International Association of Blacks in Dance (IABD) conference. IABD was founded in 1988 as a platform for Black dance artists to network, teach, learn, and showcase their accomplishments. The association holds an annual conference in which Black dance teachers, choreographers and dancers can come together and share ideas and advice. In January of 2009, I was able to attend the conference and received a wealth of information on this topic. To answer the questions that I previously stated, worship and praise dance are types of liturgical dance. Liturgical dance can simply be defined as dances done in a church to invite the Holy Spirit in and relay messages

from God to His people. This is not a new form of dance, as it has been in existence since the days in which the Old Testament of the Bible was written, used by Jewish people for various occasions. In Black traditions in liturgical dance, it employs several different forms of dance (ballet, modern, jazz, tap, and African). According to Dr. Amanda F. Standard (who held a panel discussion at the 2009 IABD conference), "liturgical dance allows the dancer to experience the very presence of God in their immediate life." It is a vehicle by which "…the audience can experience the Word of God through movement (Standard)." Dr. Standard is currently the Artistic Director of Divine Dance Institute in Washington D.C. and teaches liturgical dance and its history. Standard states that liturgical dance is used for the following purposes: praise, worship, spiritual warfare, intercession, evangelism, prophecy, sermons, personal communication, and ceremony. This is the type of dance that I was expecting to learn, however, I have learned that there are very clear differences between this type of dance and what we were referring to the potential work of dance as: a spiritual or gospel piece (which again, is a narrative dance performed to Negro spirituals or gospel music). And finally, dancing in the Spirit is simply impromptu dancing that one does when the Holy Spirit (also known as Holy Ghost) moves one to do so. This is not choreographed and may last however long the Holy Spirit wants it to. It is usually accompanied by impromptu "shouting" music from the church musicians and rhythmic clapping from the congregation.

Because a spiritual dance is a narrative a typical African American church service, it would be inappropriate to perform one in a church or church setting. It would almost appear to be mocking the traditions. A liturgical dance, however, belongs in the church setting and adds to the church experience. Put in the simplest terms, a spiritual dance is a dance *about* praising and worshipping God. A liturgical dance *is* a dance used to praise or worship God. Although I am a

liturgical dancer, I am glad that I was able to revisit and (further clarify for myself) the meanings of all these terms and the very specific differences amongst them.

In our spiritual dance, we were asked to perform many stomping steps, which were derived from African dance steps. Again, the marriage to the music was clearly evident. However, in this piece, there was a new mix of African and European movement, which ironically, happened to African American church traditions as well. Just as African American people took European ideas in Christianity and mixed them with their own music and manifestations of the Holy Spirit, the dance that we did to portray this employed various ballet steps alongside the "church shoutin.'" One minute, we were doing tours en l'air and Italian pas de chats, the next we were doing rhythmic stomps. I found that although the dance was not what I originally had in mind, it was a representation of what really happened in the history of the African American church. In this way, the piece did contribute to the continuity of the project, although not in the way I had envisioned it would.

MODERN

The modern dance was choreographed by Guy Thorne, a native of Guyana. Previously, he danced with the Jamaican National Dance Company, and currently he is a dancer with Garth Fagan Dance Company. His style of modern was in the form of Black traditions in Modern dance. It contained a unique blend of modern, Afro-Caribbean and Jamaican folklore dance. It was interesting to learn the history behind the folklore dance steps because they were linked to highly political issues in Jamaica. This provided a window into the history of slaves and their descendants in the Caribbean islands, who have their own unique story, however similar it may seem to that of African Americans. The folklore steps that we learned were *jonkunnu, quadrille, pocomania* and *kumina.* Jonkunnu is a traditional dance of African origin, based on characters such as *Pitchy Patchy*, a ghost like character who is ever changing and always exists. Pitchy Patchy and other jonkunnu characters vary from island to island, and were created after Emancipation. In contrast, the quadrille steps that we learned were influenced primarily by European ballroom dance that was performed by gentry during slavery. This was another instance where slaves adopted movement from their masters and personalized it. In this way, jonkunnu and quadrille are a direct reflection of the political and social climate of Jamaica during two very different periods in history (JCDC pars. 4 and 6). I experienced pre-emancipation and post-emancipation movement in the same dance, and they were all used in a different context for different reasons. This was amazing to me. Taking movement from one generation to the next and the next was primarily the basis of our concert. The heritage and legacy of movement was the focal point of our research, and was achieved so beautifully in the piece titled “Out of One, Many.” I did not *fully* realize the spectrum of movement being given to us, until I later did more research on the distinct dances that Guy Thorne taught us. It was

important to include this sort of mixing of American modern dance and Jamaican dance because as I stated earlier, I was trained in Fagan technique for several years, and Garth Fagan also calls upon his Jamaican ancestry to add flavor to his American modern dance technique. The piece choreographed by Mr. Thorne represented an important element in my own personal dance background.

In terms of the dance's relationship to the other dances in the concert, it certainly contained resiliency, mobility of the spine and pelvis, and a quick access to one's weight. This dance, however, was different in the sense that it did not always employ a marriage to the music. The choreographer chose to juxtapose the movement and music fairly often in the piece, and this provided a new level of texture to the piece. This is a trademark of Fagan technique, so I achieved the choreographer's aesthetic goals with more ease than I did the others. The dance also contained stillness as a focal point of the choreographic landscape (another element used often in Fagan technique). Stillness requires an adept ability to control one's muscles, especially when the choreography calls for an effortless leap or sudden fall immediately following the stillness. As a performer, I found this choreographic device to be thrilling, and I pushed myself to perform these moments with as much conviction as I could. As in the spiritual dance, we did perform quite a few movements influenced by European traditions in dance. I feel that from the spiritual dance to the end of the concert, the dancing reflected a shift in political and social climate. It reflected the mixing and matching that occurred (and continues to occur) on our continent, and so there is no longer this idea of "pure movement" but an eclectic blend takes place.

POST MODERN AND HIP HOP

The next piece in the show was the post-modern dance and was choreographed by Nicole Stanton, a former professor at OSU. This dance, in my opinion was unlike any other, in the sense that we did not attempt to use any type of "culturally authentic" movement. We also acted as co-choreographers of the piece. It was a sort of autobiographical dance, because we created small phrases that reflected our personal experiences and developed them into a full piece. Nicole Stanton approached the dance in true post-modern fashion by starting each rehearsal with a question or a quick write, prompting us to reflect and then choreograph. She arranged and rearranged, consulting us and our ideas every step of the way. She even allowed us to bring in several song ideas, and we chose to use the song that reminded me of my childhood, called "Spirituals Medley" by Sounds of Blackness. This dance was the product of our memories, families and personalities. There is no narrative or storyline, only a conversation between Erika Harris and me, in which we share our stories and allow them to overlap.

The movement is just as eclectic as our memories are, and so there is a smattering of all kinds of influences. In the beginning, I do a Charleston step while Erika vibrates her pelvis. Later, we fall and roll and let the movement slide out of our limbs and into the space. The dance still contains resiliency and a keen sense of weight, but in a much more indirect way than all the other dances. In some ways, it allowed us to dance more freely, which is the direction in which post-modern dance has always been heading. This dance was the one most closely related to the dancing that I have experienced at The Ohio State University's Department of Dance. Because of the training that I received here, I was familiar with the methods of choreography that Stanton employed. I immediately began accessing my personal choreographic voice, as I have practiced so many times in the studios of OSU's Dance department. Releasing my weight and dancing

with pliable limbs and joints were also important characteristics of the dance and are greatly valued here at OSU.

Finally, the last piece in the show was a hip hop dance choreographed by Manwe Sauls-Addison. This dance portrayed just one of the many current manifestations of the history and culture of African American people. Many West African, Afro-Caribbean, church and modern dance moves were used in the dance and were presented in a new and innovative way. Hip hop is the modern, American version of so many African and Afro-Caribbean dance steps, and so it was fitting that we incorporated it into the show. In addition to authentic steps being borrowed, some of the same elements of movement and choreography were present in the dance.

Prior to studying at OSU, I had no experience with hip hop, so performing a hip hop piece challenged my performance abilities. Hip hop is characterized by some of the same elements as African dance: specificity of shape, fluid movements, and high energy. Again, I broadened my movement range and vocabulary, this time by learning to pop and lock (which are dance practices characterized by hard, fast stops or freezes), and learning to move with quickness and ease. Unlike many of the dances that were performed in the show, there was no continuous narrative or story line, only the narratives being told in the lyrics of each song that was used. The piece was mainly a celebration of what was, is and always will be a part of our heritage as African American women and as dancers.

EVALUATING THE PROJECT

The work that we accomplished was quite exemplary, because we successfully showcased our personal heritage as African Americans, as female dancers and as individuals. Every dance had a direct correlation to our lives and to each other. What made the concert even more successful was that our audiences were able to relate to the performances. This was clearly evident, especially during the Saturday performance, in which audience members, clapped, cheered and danced along with us in their seats! Their affirmations were constant and enthusiastic, and in the spirit of call-and-response, they cheered and we responded with more energy and conviction. Even before I actually spoke with audience members, they let us know that they felt connected to the movement by their audible responses throughout the show. It was gratifying.

Upon speaking with audience members afterwards, they expressed a greater appreciation for dance and for their personal heritages. They informed me that they could visibly see the connections between each of the dances, and never realized just how similar some dance forms (and specific dance steps) are. This is one of the main reasons we embarked on this journey: to bring dance forms of the African Diaspora to the Greater Columbus communities so that they can understand them and appreciate them. It was clear to the audience members (who came from universities, public schools, dance studios, churches and a variety of states) who Erika and I are as African American women and what the legacy of Africanist movement has afforded us. The performance was also successful in that it broadened my understanding of the dance forms that we performed, and deepened my own appreciation for the histories of each of them. As I venture into the world to become a dance educator, I now have an even deeper understanding of these

dance forms and feel confident that I can effectively and accurately teach them to young students.

As I evaluate the overall success of the project, one challenge comes to mind. At the beginning of the process, Erika and I decided on the dancers who we needed for the show. We listed more than enough dancers for each piece, to ensure that in the end, we would have enough. We chose dancers whom we thought would best exemplify the connections between the dance forms and would perform them as authentically as possible. We were also striving for creating cultural diversity amongst the cast members. This proved to be quite a challenge, one that I feel we did not fully achieve. We did in fact, secure a cast with a level of skill that was exemplary; however, we did not create a well-diversified cast. Erika and I purposefully sought to enlist Black, White, Latino, Asian and Indian dancers but only received Black candidates. It was important to us to have a diverse cast because we wanted to show that the dance forms we were presenting have evolved and do not just include descendants of Africans. We did not *fully* portray that. Although we asked several students who would bring diversity to the show to be in the show, they all declined. This could have been due to the fact that our rehearsals occurred during the summer, and most students were studying dance elsewhere. Or it could have been due to the fact that no one felt confident enough to step outside of their cultural comfort zone and take part in our project. However, I was still very pleased with the work that our cast did, and in the future, I think it would be best to communicate with possible cast members face-to-face more so than e-mail. In this way, I could have communicated to the dancers how they could contribute to the project and why I felt they would be an asset to the project. E-mail is still fairly impersonal, and I don't think it allowed me to fully express my intentions and desires for the show with my potential minority dancers (minorities in relation to the majority of the cast

members.) So we did an excellent job at displaying the validity, continuity and beauty of dance forms of the African Diaspora, but I was not completely satisfied with our portrayal of them as dance forms that cross far more cultural borders than just those of African, African American, and Afro-Caribbean peoples.

THE NEXT STEP

Now that the performance has passed, I am looking forward to engaging in more outreach activities. Currently, Erika Harris and I are presenting lecture/demonstrations for dance history classes and local health care facilities. During the month of February 2009, I hope to present portions of our work in the Columbus community in honor of Black History Month. In the spring of 2009, we will be visiting local public schools to share our work and educate students on the research that we have garnered from this experience. The next step in this journey is to share our knowledge and experiences primarily with young students, so that we can broaden their understanding of these dance forms and instill a sense of appreciation for them. This is my current and long-term goal. As I enter the professional world of dance education after college, I hope to continue sharing my experiences with students of all ages. I am so fortunate to have taken part in such an insightful and educational research project, and the lessons I have learned will always be with me, and will be present in every lesson that I teach to my students. In other words, the next step is to continue sharing, growing, researching and presenting in this field of study.

I am pleased with the results of my work, and I am proud to have achieved an accomplishment of this magnitude. *Inherited Movement, Traditions Redefined* was and is the product of our hard work, dedication, curiosity, and desire for more knowledge. It was a success in that it touched the hearts and minds of a broadly diverse audience and brought diversity to the OSU dance department and Columbus community. Dance forms of the African Diaspora were presented as a cohesive heritage of movements, qualities of movement, ideas, social commentaries, and celebrations of life. Creating this project has deepened my sense of self and of my heritage. I am elated that I was able to share it all with friends, family, colleagues and

Columbus residents. I will always cherish the lessons that I have learned (and the ones I am still learning) and hope to share them with each student who I educate in the future.

APPENDIX A

BIOGRAPHIES

Robyn Young is currently in her fourth year pursuing her BFA in Dance Education. She started dancing at the age of 13 at the Hochstein School of Music and Dance, where she was a member of the Hochstein Dance Ensemble. After leaving Hochstein, she trained intensively at Garth Fagan Dance School in Rochester, NY, her hometown. Throughout her college career she has performed many times for the community as a representative of The OSU Department of Dance and on her own merit. Upon graduation, she plans to continue her work in the dance field, teaching young students and expanding the audience of dance.

Erika Harris is a native of Columbus, OH. She is in her final year of college, working to receive her BFA in Dance Performance. She has trained with Carol Thomas, Judy Dollenmayer, Two Left Feet in the Right Direction and most intensively with BalletMet Dance Academy. She continues to perform as a student of the OSU Department of Dance and in community productions. After graduation, she plans to have a blessed performance career, and further her education pursuing a law degree.

Suzan Bradford-Kounta, Artistic Director of the Thiossane West African Dance Institute is a dancer, instructor, and choreographer of traditional West African dance. Mrs. Bradford-Kounta began her dance training at Columbus area cultural arts center at an early age. Her passion for dance radiated during her four years at Norfolk State University, VA, where she served as dance Captain for the university's dance theater. Upon completing college, Mrs. Bradford-Kounta traveled to Senegal, West Africa to study dance, music and culture. After her return, Mrs.

Bradford-Kounta secured a position with the YWCA of Columbus, where she developed, implemented and coordinated an African dance program for youth. During her fifteen years at the YWCA, Mrs. Bradford-Kounta instructed and choreographed a number of in-school and after school programs and has choreographed, directed and produced seven annual concerts with the YWCA African Beginnings Children's Dance Ensemble. Mrs. Bradford-Kounta's teaching venues have included community centers, several state universities, state institutions, treatment programs, public and private schools, special populations, conferences, and local venues such as BalletMet, Chocolate Nutcracker, SAVE Awards and First Night Columbus. Mrs. Bradford-Kounta developed and implemented staff training for Columbus Public School on Integrating the Arts in the Classroom and has completed training through the Greater Columbus Arts Council, incorporating the academic standards in its school-based arts programs. Bradford-Kounta has been an Adjunct Faculty member at Antioch College for five years and returns bi-annually to Senegal West Africa to continue studying the traditions of this art form.

Roslyn Brisco-Dove, a native of Denver, Colorado, began her dance career as an apprentice with the Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble. After graduating from high school, she became the principle dancer, touring Africa and the Philippines. This resulted in her becoming a member of the Denver-based company for fifteen years. Roslyn studied with Eleo Pomare, Donald McKayle, Paul Sanasardo, Milton Myers, Tim Jheny, Baba Chuck Davis, and the late Talley Beatty. While in Denver, she was the co-founder of the Cleo Parker Robinson training group, which now celebrates its fifteenth year as a funding organization to the Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble. Roslyn has taught creative movement, modern, jazz, and dancercise for over twenty years. After relocating to Columbus, Ohio, she joined the staff at BalletMet, teaching

Afro-Caribbean and modern dance classes. Mrs. Dove has also choreographed for productions at Eastmoor Academy and Northland High Schools.

Carmen Gaither-Alston, Founder and CEO of CDANCE Company for the Arts, has been instructing children and young adults in a variety of dance forms such as ballet, modern, jazz, and gospel/liturgical for over 18 years. She attended The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, where she earned her BFA majoring in Dance Education/Choreography.
Carmen successfully established her own dance and touring company with her dancers being featured as guest artists for main stage performances in her hometown city of Columbus, Ohio, as well as in Detroit, Michigan; Mobile, Alabama; and Virginia State University. As a director and choreographer, Carmen has had an extensive and varied career touring both nationally and internationally.

Manwe Sauls-Addison honed his dance skills in California and New York. He trained at San Francisco School of the Arts, Alvin Ailey, the Housin Authority, Reginal Savage and at Broadway Dance Center with Jermaine Browne, Rhapsody, Slam, Glen and Brian. Some of his recent performances include: Music Videos – Destiny's Child – "Loose My Breath", Tyrese "I Like Them Girls", Immature "We Got It" and Joe "Let's Stay Home Tonight"; Tours – Amerie – National Tour, Liza Minneli "Liza's Back", Debelah Morgan "Dance With Me" and many others; Stage: Berkeley City Ballet, Oakland Ballet, Savage Jazz Company, Nike Industrial, Denise Williams; Television/Video: Fashion Rocks and Black Eyed Peas, 2004 Brit Awards & Missy Elliot, Gwen Stefani, Alicia Keys, American Dreams (Gladys Knight & the Pips), Saturday Night Live & Beyonce, 2003 MTV Europe Awards, Beyonce, Michael Jackson 30th

Anniversary Special, Essence Awards 2000, NBA All Star Games and Making of the Band with P Diddy.

Nicole Stanton received her MFA in choreography from The Ohio State University (OSU) and her BA in Dance and Foreign Civilizations and Languages from Antioch College. She also studied at the Center for New Dance Development in Arnhem, Holland and the Leopold Sedor Senghor Cultural Center in Senegal, West Africa. She was a faculty member with the OSU Department of Dance for ten years before accepting her current position at Wesleyan University Department of Dance as Chair. She has also been a performer, activist costumer and arts administrator with organizations such as: In The Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theater, Minnesota Dance Alliance, and the San Francisco Mime Troop. As a choreographer her work has been presented by the Wesleyan's Center for the Arts, the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus's Martin Luther King Jr. Arts Center, Minnesota Dance Alliance, and Congress on Research in Dance, among others. Her two most recent projects include a collaboration with anthropologist and spoken word artist Gina Athena Ulysses, which was presented by the Center for the Arts at Wesleyan University, and a collaborative project with choreographers Bebe Miller, Kathleen Hermsdorff, Ming Lung Yang and musician Vernon Reid at OSU Department of Dance.

Guy Thorne is a native of Guyana and was raised on the island of Jamaica. Thorne's passion for movement was ignited in Jamaica when he joined Cathy Levy's Performing Arts Club (L.P.T.C.). After five years of classes in ballet, folk, modern and tap dance, in 2000, Thorne's passion took him from performing arts ensemble devotee through to graduate from Edna Manley

College for the Visual and Performing Arts with a Diploma in Dance Theatre and Production. Supported by the limitless love and encouragement of family, he furthered his studies as a scholarship student with the Dance Theatre of Harlem in N.Y. Since finding a home with Garth Fagan Dance in 2002, he has inspired and performed major roles, including “Senku”. Thorne also holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in dance from SUNY Brockport and currently teaches Fagan technique and repertory to students at the GFD Summer Movement Institute (SMI).

**The choreographers’ biographies are printed as they requested them to be.*

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEWS

During the rehearsal process, Erika Harris and I conducted interviews with each of the choreographers. We asked them a series of questions about their personal and dance backgrounds, specific training that they received, their vision for the piece they choreographed, the history behind the movement they employed, and their thoughts on dance in the African American heritage as a whole. We filmed the interviews and selected the most informative and interesting segments for the video that was shown in the concert. The following pages are the transcribed interview segments.

Suzan Bradford-Kounta

It's always my quest and vision to really bring the richness of African dance and its origin to people and to enhance their cultural awareness through dance, so I was elated that Robyn and Erika asked that I would support their senior project in choreographing an African dance piece. And so to show the influence of African dance as it moves into Caribbean and modern and other dance forms, [it] shows just where the whole expression of movement and feeling and *life* comes from.

Well, the first dance that the group is doing is called Econ-con, and that dance comes from the Jola people who live in southern Senegal in the Casamance region of Senegal. And those people there, the Jola people, are very high spirited, lots of real intricate movements. And also, this dance gives homage and praise to a plentiful harvest. So after they have toiled the land, planted the seeds, covered the seeds and asked the gods for a good rainy season, then there's day long celebrations for this harvest. And because the harvest is complete, they can share, they can

eat, sell, or replant, which is all in that evolution, in that circle of how things go around but also giving respect to the earth and the sun and the people around.

The second part of the dance is also from Jola people and that's called Lingen, and this dance is particularly for women. And so as a woman has difficulty caring a child full term, there's a group of women that come around her, wash her, and give her special clothing to wear to bless her so that she's able to carry the baby full term. And once the baby is here, they do the same for the baby and the mom to ensure good health, good wealth and a happy and long life. The actual study of it is just really, really rich and it can help a person move through their life with some understanding, with some guidance. And it creates a path in which that person can reach their optimal being.

Art, be it dance, music, whatever, can help you find that path and can be that direction for you because of the study that goes with it. And you can find your connection, you can find your cultural awareness there, you can find your social connection in that. So it impacts, art just impacts people on a whole because it gives balance to their lives, it gives balance to the world, it gives balance to an arena.

Roslyn Dove

My great grandmother was from the Dominican, and so I had not trained at all in Caribbean dance. It's just something that came to me. I was actually working with Donald McKayle when he did "Tampura Jones"(?) and he choreographed a piece on the Cleo Parker Robinson Dance which I was a member [of], and it's funny because when I choreographed the 'Chocolate Nutcracker', and when Wayne Baskin (remember Wayne?), he said "that is so… you

have so much Dunham". And I was like, "I never studied with Ms. Dunham." It's just what's in me. I say it's from my ancestors from the Dominican, that's all I know.

Carmen Alston

The true meaning of dance to me is a [n] inner self-spirituality, it is deep and it comes from within.

My dance's choreography has become more free. And most of the movements I have now put more of the other techniques into my movements, so that the techniques (especially ballet and modern) as a combination could be a little more soulful.

The movements in this dance (that is titled 'Finally') [are] natural. The natural moves that are being done would be done in a church surrounding. Spirituality in dance normally comes from being in a circle, and then losing control of every movement and being free. So the spirituality movements of this piece, you have to be free and not try to control anything that you do. Let your body go, and be yourself.

Guy Thorne

I grew up the first 10, 11 years of my life in Guyana, and Guyana is predominantly East India[n]. And so there was the Hindu culture that I was always around. And then, moving to Jamaica, I got to be around more of an Afro-centric culture. And then, moving to America I got to be around more of a Euro-centric culture, so all those things I try to put into my dance. There are steps from Jonkunnu. Jonkunnu is a traditional form found in Jamaica, and throughout other Caribbean countries. There's Pocomania, and Pocomania is a dance form that comes from the fusion of Christian beliefs and African beliefs, and so the dance has a very joyful feeling but at

the same time it has a very African groundedness to it. And you'll see in the solo that Robyn does, where she walks around and she's pumping with her arms—that is reminiscent of how they behave when they're at church. The other part is the Quadrille, and the Quadrille is a dance form that comes from Europe, but the slaves took it and in mockery of their slave holders, they did these dance forms, they did the dance.

Black people have always used dance to express whatever was happening. If there was a harvest, they used dance to express that… we have gone past that, I believe, especially when it comes on to concert dance. We no longer need to show these big narratives. I think dance needs to evolve…Dance should represent the essence of who we are as an individual and that's what dance represents to me. And so, as Black people and Black heritage, since dance was used to represent whatever they were living and experiencing, then I feel dance should express whatever *I'm* living and experiencing. And since I don't have to do a harvest dance, but I can still do dance in celebration of my life, in celebration of anything. Getting a college degree; I can create a dance based on that and it doesn't have to be as obvious, but I think dance can be used to celebrate whatever your experiencing, while still staying true to what it has meant for Black people over the years.

Nicole Stanton

What I'll say is that I think it's a really interesting drawing together of community resources, (Columbus community and beyond) and OSU resources. And I think that's a great sort of step in the right direction for the department, for the Columbus community; like a lot of that doesn't happen as much as I think it should.

My greatest hope is that it is really an opportunity for it to be *about you*. Not just about your dancing but about who you are as people, and as women, as African Americans, all those kinds of very personal things; that it has an element of autobiography for you guys… One of the things I'm interested in, in the idea of African American presence in modern dance, is to think of that broadly; that there's a whole range of what that aesthetic can mean, that it's not just one thing. So, I hope that the piece in some ways can contribute to that dialogue because of its context in your Diaspora concert.

On one level, I think that the arts have been the place (have really been the repository) for African traditions, cultures, ways of life, ways of being, ways of living for African Americans, for Black folks in America. It was in music, it was in dancing, that all those things continued to live and I think they *continue* to live in those things. It's also been one of, I think, the interesting ways that Black culture has influenced American culture in general to a huge degree… So I really think the arts have been an incredible, cultural conservatory; that's where those things have been preserved.

One thing I would say is much like traditional forms, or folk forms, modern dance continues to evolve and change to suit the people who practice and participate in it, and hopefully, it can maintain that growth and flexibility. In some ways I feel like we're at a little bit of a low tide for modern dance, for contemporary dance, you know? It's not a form that a lot of people know about. It's not like you have to fight to get tickets, for the most part, to dance concerts! So I guess if that's an unfortunate trend, that I'd love to see changed in some ways, and I think things like the project you guys are doing actually go a long way for helping that, for establishing a broader community and audience for contemporary dance.

Manwe Sauls-Addison

The true meaning of dance to me: expressing yourself through the body without using words. As a culture, we have gone through a lot and we have a lot to say, and it's the extra challenge of not saying anything but still getting your point across with dance.

You're human first, no matter what you are, before you started dancing, before you started school before you even started walking, you're human first. So bringing that human element back to dance, and not thinking so "5, 6, 7, 8, I gotta be on the count," and letting the soul and the spirit guide you is better than anything and any count that you can try and figure out, that you can find any "and" count, any "boom kak", anything besides that, bringing the spirit to it is what's going to set you apart from anything. And that's what we as people always have to bring back; it's the spirit.

APPENDIX C

ORIGINAL PROJECT BUDGET

	Airfare	Hotel (Extended Stay Easton 3days 2nights)	Honorarium	Per diem
Monica Richardson	$500-$800	$400	$400	$200
Manwe'	$550-$850	$400	$400	$200
April Berry	$500-$800	$400	$400	$200
Nicole Stanton	$650-$950	$400	$400	$200
Guy Thorne	$550-$650	$400	$400	$200
Susan Bradford-Kounta	0	0	$400	$0
Roslyn Dove	0	0	$400	$0
Carmen Alston	0	0	$400	$0
Total	$2750-$4050	$2,000	$3,200	$1,000

Advertising	Photography	Programs		$1850-$1950
Radio ($100)	Kim Harris $200	R. Young/E. Harris $100		$400
facebook (no $)				$400
myspace (no $)				$400
OSU/Department calendar (no $)		$500	$3,000	$13,150-$14450
postcards (200)/posters (50) $300				
Total				
$300	$200	$100		$13,150-$14,450

**This budget was used to apply for the Undergraduate Research Scholarship and does not contain the actual amounts of monies that were used.*

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